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Commodities

Soviet-Bloc Nations Expected to Harvest Fair 1964 Grain Crop

Reports See Continued Imports
By Hungary and by Yugoslavia;
Russia May Buy Feed Grains

By a WALL STREET JOURNAL Staff Reporter

MUNICH—Soviet-bloc nations are expected to harvest fair grain crops this year, but Hungary and Yugoslavia will continue to import substantial quantities of grain.

Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, in reporting this, also say there is a strong possibility that Russia will require some feed-grain imports to prop sagging hog production. Wheat-import possibilities, the two sources claim, will hinge on the ability of Russian farmers to handle this year's crop.

"Everything now depends on organizing cadres and the availability and reliability of harvesters, transport and storage facilities during the harvesting season," says Keith Bush, the former British military officer who is Radio Liberty's economic researcher.

The Soviets say they are harvesting a crop of about 120 million metric tons of usable grain. This would be up from the disastrous 1963 crop of 95 million to 105 million tons. This year's production, however, would still be far below the goal of about 160 million tons that Moscow planners had set for 1964.

Soviet Data Discounted

Private sources reporting to Radio Free Europe say their estimates discount Soviet statistics by 10% to 15%. They say the estimates made by the Russians are inflated because they don't take into consideration the chaff and other foreign materials.

The combined 1964 harvests in other East European countries is expected to average close to last year's level, except Yugoslavia, where production may be 10% to 15% under last year.

Thus the outlook is for Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia to continue importing substantial quantities of grain. Russia is

known to require perhaps 500,000 tons of grain imports for its eastern maritime provinces, areas so far removed from grain-producing centers that transportation economics favor imports.

Radio Free Europe's Carl Zoerb, a former official with the U.S. Department of Agriculture who has spent much of his life following Russian agricultural developments, says, "This year's harvest is already 8 to 10 days late because of unfavorable weather."

Other authorities see this year's Russian harvest this way. The Soviets had a poor winter wheat crop in many sectors because of a dry autumn last year followed by inadequate snow cover through the winter. Much of the lost wheat land was replanted in corn this spring.

Nevertheless, the broad picture of Soviet agriculture still is one of a sick industry, authorities declare. The drive to bring more fertilizers to farms is producing some results, but agronomists are so short that often the wrong fertilizer is put on the land. Moreover

lack of incentives, poor transportation and undermechanization all contribute to inefficiency.

Pig Population Plummeted

One Radio Free Europe study put together from diverse Soviet statistics clearly indicates how feed-grain shortages have contributed to small stocks of meat. Russia's pig population dropped to 40.7 million on Jan. 1, 1964, from 70 million a year earlier.

"Thus organized slaughter cut the pig population by an astonishing 41.8% in one year," says Mr. Zoerb. "The organized nature of the emergency operation leaves no doubt that central party and agricultural authorities ordered the reduction in consequence of the feed prices brought about by the harvest failure."

The Soviets have concentrated their main efforts to raise meat output in the pig sector of the livestock industry. The Russians prefer pork to beef on their dinner plates, and the drop in pig numbers represents a major setback for Premier Khrushchev's ambitious program to overtake the U.S. in per-capita meat production, sources said.

The pig population in the Soviet Union since the beginning of the year has increased, but even with favorable conditions it will take Russia two years to rebuild pig numbers to the Jan. 1, 1963, level, the Radio Free Europe report says. It adds that the Soviet consumers will be on short rations for pork and sausages for some years to come.

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